

# The Exploits of Elaine

A Detective Novel and a Motion Picture Drama

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Creator of the "Craig Kennedy" Series

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## SYNOPSIS.

The New York police are mystified by a series of murders and other crimes. The principal clue to the criminal is the warning letter which is sent to the victims, signed with a "clutching hand." The last victim of the mysterious assassin is a young man named Elaine. The insurance president, Mr. Bennett, the famous scientific detective, is called to investigate the mystery. What Kennedy accomplishes is told by his friend, a newspaper man, after many fruitless attempts to put Elaine and Craig Kennedy out of the way the Clutching Hand is at last found to be none other than Perry Bennett, Elaine's lawyer and the man who is engaged to marry. Bennett flees to the den of one of his Chicago friends, the Chinaman, for refuge. The Chinaman, however, gives the police a tip which will suspend any suspicion for months. Kennedy reaches Elaine's side just after he has lost consciousness and supposes him dead.

## SIXTEENTH EPISODE

### THE CRYPTIC RING.

Kennedy had been engaged for some time in the only work outside of the Dodge case which he had consented to take for weeks.

Our old friend, Dr. Leslie, the coroner, had appealed to him to solve a ticklish point in a Tong murder case which had set all Chinatown roge. It was, indeed, a very bewildering case. A Chinaman named Li Chang, leader of the Chang Wah Tong, had been poisoned, but so far no one had been able to determine what poison it was or even to prove that there had been a poison, except for the fact that the man was dead, and Kennedy had taken the thing up in a great measure because of the sudden turn in the Dodge case which had brought him into such close contact with the Chinese.

I had been watching Kennedy with interest for the Tong was always make-picturesque newspaper stories, when a knock at the door announced the arrival of Dr. Leslie, anxious for some result.

"Have you been able to find out anything yet?" he greeted Kennedy eagerly as Craig looked up from his microscope.

Kennedy turned and nodded. "Your dead man was murdered by means of scorpion, of which, you know, the active principle is the deadly alkaloid acouline."

"There are several treatments for scorpion poisoning," ruminated Kennedy. "I would say that one of the latest and best is digitalin given hypodermically." He took down a bottle of digitalin from a cabinet, adding, "only it was too late in this case."

Just what the relations were between Long Sin and the Chong Wah Tong I have never been able to determine exactly. But one thing was certain: Long Sin on his arrival in New York had offended the Tong, and now that his master, Wu Fang, was here the offence was even greater, for the criminal society brooked no rival.

In the dark recesses of a poorly furnished cellar, serving as the Tong headquarters, the new leader and several of his most trusted followers were now plotting revenge. Long Sin, they believed, was responsible for the murder, and with truly Oriental guile, they had obtained a hold over Wu Fang's secretary.

Their plan decided on, the Chinamen left the headquarters and made their way separately uptown. They rejoined one another in the shelter of a rather poor house, before which was a board fence, in the vicinity of a fashionable apartment house. A moment's conference followed, and then the secretary glided away.

Wu had taken another apartment uptown in one of the large apartment houses near a parkway.

These Long Sin was now engaged in making all possible provisions for the safety of his master. Anyone who had happened to glance up at the roof of the tall apartment building might have seen Long Sin's figure silhouetted against the sky on the top of the apartment roof near a flagpole.

He had just finished fastening to the flagpole a stout rope which stretched taut across an area some twenty or thirty feet wide to the next building, where it was fastened to a chimney. Again and again he tested it, and finally with a nod of satisfaction descended from the roof and went to the apartment of Wu.

There, alone, he paused for a few minutes to gaze in wonder at the cryptic ring which had been the net result so far of his efforts to find the millions which Bennett, the Clutching Hand, had hidden. He wore it, strangely enough, over his index finger, and as he examined it he shook his head in doubt.

Neither he nor his master had yet been able to fathom the significance of the ring.

Long Sin thought that he was unobserved. But outside, looking through the keyhole, was Wu's secretary, who had stolen in on the mission which had been set for him at the Tong headquarters.

Long Sin went over to a desk and opened a secret box in which Wu had placed several packages of money

with which to bribe those whom he wished to get into his power. It was Long Sin's mission to carry out this scheme, so he packed the money into a bag, drew his coat more closely about him and left the room.

No sooner had he gone than the secretary hurried into the room, paused a moment to make sure that Long Sin was not coming back, then hurried over to a closet near by.

From a secret hiding place he drew out a small bow and arrow. He sat down at a table and hastily wrote a few Chinese characters on a piece of paper, rolling up the note into a thin quill which he inserted into a prepared place in the arrow.

Then he raised the window and deftly shot the arrow out.

Down the street, back of the board fence, where the final conference had taken place, was a rather sleepy-looking Chinaman, taking an occasional puff at a cigarette doped with opium.

He jumped to his feet suddenly. With a thud an arrow had buried itself quivering in the fence. Quickly he seized it, drew out the note and read it.

In the Canton vernacular it read briefly: "He goes with much money." It was enough. Instantly the startling news overcame the effect of the dope, and the Chinaman shuffled off quickly to the Tong headquarters.

Long Sin was making his rounds, visiting all those whom the glitter of Wu's money could corrupt.

Suddenly from the shadows of a narrow street, lined with the stores of petty Chinese merchants, half a dozen lithe and murderous figures leaped out behind Long Sin and seized him. He struggled, but they easily threw him down.

The half dozen Tong men seized the money which Long Sin carried and deftly stripped him of everything else of value.

It was the day after he returned from Aunt Tabby's that Kennedy called again upon Elaine, and that she and Aunt Josephine were engaged in the pleasant pastime of arranging an entertainment.

Jennings announced Craig and held back the portieres as he entered.

"Oh, good!" cried Elaine as she saw him. "You are just in time. I was going to send you this, but I should much rather give it to you."

She handed him a tastefully engraved sheet of paper which he read with interest.

Miss Elaine Dodge requests the honor of your presence at an Oriental Reception on April 6th, at 8 o'clock.

"Very interesting," exclaimed Craig enthusiastically. "I shall be delighted to come."

He looked about a moment at the library which Elaine was already rearranging for the entertainment.

"Then you must work," she cried gayly. "You are just in time to help me buy the decorations. No objections—come along."

Among the many places which Elaine had down on her shopping list was a small Chinese curio shop on lower Fifth avenue.

They entered and were greeted with a profound bow by the proprietor. He was the new Tong leader, and this uptown shop was his cover.

Elaine explained what it was she wanted, and with Kennedy's aid selected a number of Chinese hangings and decorations. They were about to leave the shop when Elaine's eye was attracted by a little showcase in which were many quaint and valuable Chinese ornaments in gold and silver and covered with ivory.

"What an odd looking thing," she said, pointing out a knobbed ring which rested on the black velvet of the case.

"Quite odd," agreed Kennedy.

The subtle Chinaman stood by the pile of hangings on the counter which Elaine had bought, overjoyed at such a large sale. Praising the ring to Elaine, he turned insistently to Kennedy. There was nothing else for Craig to do—he bought the ring, and the Chinaman proved his ability as a merchant.

From the curio shop where Elaine had completed her purchases they drove to Kennedy's laboratory.

We were in the midst of planning the entertainment when a slight cough behind me made me start and turn quickly.

There stood Long Sin, the astute Chinaman who had delivered the bomb to Kennedy and had betrayed Bennett. We had seen very little of him since then.

Long Sin bowed low and shuffled over closer to Kennedy. I noticed that Elaine eyed Long Sin sharply.

"I am in great trouble, Professor Kennedy," began Long Sin in a low tone. "You don't know the Chinese of this city, but if you did you would know what blackmailers there are among them. I have refused to pay blackmail to the Chong Wah Tong and since then it has been trouble, trouble, trouble."

Kennedy looked up quickly at the

name Chong Wah Tong, thinking of the investigation which the coroner had asked him to make into the murder. He and Long Sin moved a few steps away, discussing the affair.

Elaine and I were still talking over the entertainment.

She happened to place her hand on the desk near Long Sin. My back was toward him and I did not see him start suddenly and look at her hand. On it was the ring—the ring which, unknown to us, Long Sin had found in the passageway under Aunt Tabby's garden, of which he had been robbed. Long Sin decided to recover the ring by stealth.

Elaine was still talking enthusiastically about her party, when Long Sin turned from Kennedy and moved toward us with a bow.

"The lady speaks of an Oriental reception," he remarked. "Would she care to engage a magician?"

Elaine turned to him surprised. "Do you mean that you are a magician?" she asked, puzzled.

Long Sin smiled quietly. He reached over and took a small bottle from Kennedy's laboratory table. Holding it in his hand almost directly before us, he made a few slight-of-hand passes, and presto! the bottle had disappeared.

A few more passes, and a test tube appeared in its place. Before we knew it he had caused the test tube to disappear and the bottle to reappear. We all applauded enthusiastically.

"I don't think that is such a bad idea after all," nodded Kennedy to Elaine.

It was the night of the reception. The Dodge library was transformed. The Oriental hangings which Elaine and Kennedy had purchased seemed to breathe mysticism. At the far end of the room a platform had been arranged to form a stage on which Long Sin was to perform his sleight of hand.

Almost everybody had arrived when Elaine turned to the guests and introduced Long Sin with a little speech.

I shall not attempt to describe the amazing series of tricks which he performed. His hands and fingers seemed to move like lightning.

He had finished and every one crowded about him to congratulate him on his skill. His only answer, however, was his inscrutable smile.

"This is wonderful, wonderful," I repeated as I happened to meet Elaine alone. We walked into the conservatory while the guests were crowding around Long Sin. She seated herself for the first time during the evening.

"May I get you an ice?" I suggested.

She thanked me, and I hurried off. As I passed through the drawing room I did not notice that Long Sin had managed to escape further congrat-

ulations of the guests. Just then a waiter passed through with ices on a tray. I called to him and he stopped.

A moment later Long Sin himself took an ice from the tray and retreated back of the portieres. No one was about, and he hastily drew a bottle from his pocket. On the bottle was a Chinese label. He palmed the bottle, and anyone who had chance to see him would have noticed that he passed it two or three times over the ice, then, lifting the portieres, entered the drawing room again.

He had made the circuit of the rooms in such a way as to bring himself out directly in my path. With a smile he stopped before me, rubbing both hands together.

"It is for Miss Elaine?" he asked. I nodded.

By this time several of the guests who were fascinated with Long Sin gathered about us. Long Sin flattered open a Chinese fan which he had used in his tricks, passed it over my hand, and in some incomprehensible way I felt the plate with the ice literally disappear from my grasp. My face must have shown my surprise. A burst of laughter from the other guests greeted me. I looked at Long Sin, half angry, yet unable to say anything, for the joke was plainly on me. He smiled, made another pass with the fan, and instantly the plate with the ice was back in my hand.

Meanwhile Kennedy had been moving from one to another of the guests seeking Elaine. He had already taken

an ice from the waiter and was going to the direction of the conservatory. There he found her.

"Won't you take this ice?" he asked, handing it to her.

"It is very kind of you," she said, "but I have already sent Walter for one."

Kennedy insisted and she took it. She had already started to eat it when I appeared in the doorway.

Kennedy laughed, rather pleased at having beaten me.

"Never mind, Walter," he said with a smile. "I'll take it. And er—I don't think that Elaine will object if you play the host for a little while with Aunt Josephine," he hinted.

Kennedy, however, was not alone. Back in the palms in the conservatory two heavy black eyes were eagerly watching.

Chatting with animation, Kennedy tasted the ice. He had taken only a couple of spoonfuls when a look of wonder and horror seemed to spread over his face.

He rose quickly. A cold sweat seemed to break out all over him. His nerves almost refused to respond.

He took only a few steps, began to stagger, and finally sank down on the floor.

Elaine screamed.

We rushed in from the library and drawing room.

He had fallen near the fountain and one hand drooped over into the water. As he fell back he seemed to have only just enough strength to withdraw his hand from the fountain. On the stone coping, slowly and laboriously, he moved his finger.

"What's the matter, old man?" I asked, bending over him.

There was no answer, but he managed to turn his head, and I followed the direction of his eyes.

With trembling finger he was tracing out, one by one, some letters. I looked and it flashed over me what he meant. He had written with the water: "Digitalin—lab!"

I jumped up and almost without a word dashed out of the conservatory, down the hall and into the first car waiting outside.

"To the laboratory," I directed, giving the driver the directions, "and drive like the devil!"

Fortunately there was no one to stop us, and I know we broke all the speed laws of New York. I dashed into the laboratory, almost broke open the cabinet, and seized the bottle of digitalin and a hypodermic syringe, then rushed madly out again and into the car.

Meanwhile some of the guests had lifted up Kennedy, too excited to notice Long Sin in his hiding place. They had laid Craig down on a couch

Elaine had spent rather a sleepless night after the attempt to poison her which had miscarried and resulted in poisoning Kennedy.

To keep her mind off the thing, she had already started to take down the decorations.

The telephone rang and Elaine answered it. Her face showed that something startling had happened.

"It was Jameson," she cried, almost dropping the receiver, overcome.

They all hurried to her. "He says that Mr. Kennedy and he were visiting that Chinaman this morning and Mr. Kennedy suffered a relapse—is dying there, in the Chinaman's apartment. He wants us to come quickly and bring that medicine that they used last night. He says it is on the taboret in the library."

It was only a matter of minutes when they pulled up before the apartment house where Wu had taken the suite from which Long Sin had telephoned the message in my name. Together Elaine and Aunt Josephine hurried in.

Kennedy went directly from the laboratory to the Dodge house.

I don't think I ever saw such an expression of surprise on anybody's face as that on Jennings' when he opened the door and saw us. He was aghast. Back of him we could see Marie. She looked as if she had seen a ghost.

"Is Miss Elaine in?" asked Kennedy. Jennings was even too dumfounded to speak.

"Why, what's the matter?" demanded Kennedy.

"Then—er—you are not ill again?" he managed to blurt out.

"Ill again?" repeated Kennedy.

"Why," explained Jennings, "didn't Mr. Jameson just now telephone that you had had a relapse in the apartment of that Chinaman, and for Miss Elaine to hurry over there right away with that bottle of medicine?"

Kennedy waited to hear no more. Seizing me by the arm, he turned and dashed down the steps and back again into the taxicab in which we had come.

In Wu's apartment Long Sin was giving his secretary and another Chinaman the most explicit instructions. As he finished each nodded and showed him a Chinese dirk concealed under his blouse.

Just then a knock sounded at the door. The secretary opened it, and Josephine and Elaine almost ran in. Long Sin rose and bowed with a smile.

"Where is Mr. Kennedy?" demanded Elaine.

Long Sin bowed again, spreading out his hands, palms outward.

"Mr. Kennedy? He is not here."

Then, straightening up, he faced the two women squarely.

"You have a ring that means much to me," he said quickly. "The only way to get it from you was to bring you here."

Aunt Josephine was standing with her back to the door leading into another room. She happened to look up and saw the secretary, who was near her and half turned away. From where she was standing she could see the murderous dirk up his sleeve.

She acted instantly. Without a word she summoned all her strength and struck him. The secretary stumbled.

"Elaine," she cried, "look out! they have knives!"

Before Elaine knew it Aunt Josephine had taken her by the arm, had dragged her into the back room, and, although Long Sin and the others had rushed forward, managed to slam the door and lock it.

The Chinamen set to work immediately to pry it open.

While they were at work on the door, which was already awaying, Aunt Josephine and Elaine were running about, trying to find an outlet from the room.

There seemed to be no way out. Even the windows were locked.

"I don't know why they want the ring," whispered Aunt Josephine, "but they won't get it. Give it to me, Elaine."

She almost seized the ring, hiding it in her waist. As she did so the door burst open and Wu, Long Sin and the other Chinamen rushed in.

A second later they had seized Elaine and Aunt Josephine.

Kennedy and I dashed up before the apartment house in which we knew that Long Sin lived, leaped out of the car and hurried in.

It was on the second floor, and we did not wait for the elevator but took the steps two at a time. Kennedy found the door locked. Instantly he whipped out his revolver and shot the lock in pieces. We threw ourselves against the door, the broken lock gave way and we rushed in through the front room.

No one was there, but in a back room we could hear sounds. It was Elaine and Aunt Josephine struggling with the Chinamen. Long Sin and the others had seized Elaine and Aunt Josephine was trying to help her just as we rushed in. With a blow Kennedy knocked out the secretary, while I struggled with the other Chinamen who blocked our way.

Then Kennedy went directly at Long Sin. They struggled furiously.

Long Sin, with his wonderful knowledge of jitsu, might not have been a match for six other Chinamen, but he was for one white man. With a mighty effort he threw Kennedy, rushed for the door and, as he passed through the outside room, seized a Tong ax from the wall.

Afraid of the wonderful jitsu, I had picked up the first thing handy, which was a taboret. I literally broke it over the head of my Chinaman, then

turned and dashed out after Long Sin just as Kennedy picked himself up and followed.

I caught up with the Chinaman and we had a little struggle, but he managed to break away and raised his ax threateningly. A shout from Kennedy caused him to turn and run down the flight of stairs, Kennedy closely behind him.

In the main hall of the apartment house were two elevator shafts facing the street entrance, some twenty-five or thirty feet away. Through the street door the janitor and two or three other men were running in. They had heard the noise of the fighting above.

Escape to the street was cut off. We were behind him on the flight of stairs.

Long Sin did not hesitate a moment. He ran to the elevator, the door of which was open, seized the elevator boy and sent him sprawling on the marble floor. Then he slammed the door and the elevator shot up.

Kennedy was only a few feet behind, and he took in the situation at a glance. He leaped into the other elevator, and before the surprised boy could interfere shot it up only a few feet behind Long Sin.

It was a wild race to the roof. Long Sin had the start, and as the elevator reached the top floor he flung it open, dashed out and through a door up to the roof itself.

A second later Kennedy's elevator stopped. Craig leaped out and fired his last shot at the legs of Long Sin as he disappeared at the top of the flight of stairs to the roof. He flung the revolver from him and followed.

Without a moment's hesitation Kennedy threw himself at Long Sin. They struggled with each other. Finally Long Sin managed to wrench one arm loose and raise the Tong ax over Kennedy's head.

Kennedy dodged back. As he did so he tripped on the very edge of the roof and went sliding down the slates of the mansard.

Fortunately he was able to catch himself in the gutter.

It was the opportunity that Long Sin wanted. He started across the rope, which he had stretched from the apartment house to the building across the court, with all the deftness of the most expert Chinese acrobat.

By this time I had reached the roof, followed by the janitor and the elevator boys.

Kennedy was now crawling up the mansard, helping himself as best he could by some of the ornamental ironwork.

Long Sin had reached the roof on the opposite side as we ran across in the direction of the taut rope.

A moment later he turned and bowed at us mockingly, then disappeared behind a skylight.

Kennedy did not stop an instant.

"You fellows go to the street and see if you can head him off that way," he cried. "Stay here, Walter."

Before I knew it he had seized the rope and was going across to the other building hand-over-hand. It was a perilous undertaking.

Kennedy had almost reached the other roof when suddenly from behind the skylight stepped Long Sin. With a wicked leer, he advanced to the edge of the roof, his ax upraised. I looked across the yawning chasm, horrified.

Slowly Long Sin raised his ax above his head, gathering all the strength which he had, waiting for Kennedy to approach closer. Kennedy stopped. Swiftly the ax descended, slashing the rope at one blow.

Like the weight of a pendulum Kennedy swung back against our own building, managing to keep his hold on the rope with superhuman strength.

There was a tremendous shattering of glass.

The rope had been just long enough to make him strike a window and he had gone crashing through the glass three floors below.

I dashed down the stairs and into the apartment. Kennedy was badly cut.

"Help me, quick, Walter," he urged, moving toward the elevators.

Meanwhile Long Sin had quickly dived down into the next building. A few moments later he had come out on the ground floor at the rear.

Gazing about to see whether he was followed, he disappeared.

Back in the apartment Elaine and Aunt Josephine were just about to run out when the two Chinamen who had been knocked out recovered. One of them threw himself on Elaine. Aunt Josephine tried to ward him off, but the other one struck her and threw her down.

Before she could recover they had seized Elaine.

With a hasty guttural exclamation they picked her up and ran out. Instead of going downstairs they crossed the hallway, slamming the door behind them.

As Kennedy and I reached the ground floor we saw the janitor and one of the elevator boys on either side of Aunt Josephine.

"Elaine! Elaine!" she cried.

"What's the matter?" demanded Kennedy, leaning heavily on me.

"They have kidnapped her," cried Aunt Josephine.

Kennedy pulled himself together. "Tell me, quick—how did it happen?" he demanded of Aunt Josephine.

"It was the ring," she cried, handing it to him.

Kennedy took the ring and looked at it for a moment. Then he turned to us blankly.

All the rooms were empty. Elaine had been spirited away.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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